Mill's *Utilitarianism*

Chapters III, IV, and V

Moral Psychology

- From where does the GHP "derive its binding force"? That is, what *motivates* us to act upon or at least judge with it? (159)
- Mill's answer is **sanctions**, i.e., punishments, whether they be
  - ***external*** (e.g., fines, jail [law]; contempt, ostracism [opinion]) or
  - ***internal*** (e.g., guilt or shame) (159-64; cf. Chapter V [below]).
- What is the *source* of this kind of guilt or shame, however?
- Here he greatly improves on Bentham by explaining how a "powerful *natural* sentiment," namely "the *social* feelings of mankind; the desire to be in **unity** with our fellow creatures" (164), motivate our obedience to the GHP (also, "**sympathy**" [166]). *This explains why our **own** utility might be linked to that of **other** sentient beings* (cf. ↑Plato↓).
- This sympathy must be *cultivated*, though, by **education**, one that is *religious* in its pervasiveness and demandingness but *not* in its content (cf. Comte's "religion of humanity" [166]).

The “Proof” of the GHP

- Mill notes here that “to be incapable of proof by reasoning is common to all *first* principles,” *including the GHP* (168; cf. 134)—nonetheless, he still tries to offer a kind of proof.
- This “proof,” unfortunately, has at least *two* serious flaws:
  1. **Is/ought conflation:** “the sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is *desirable*$_1$, is that people do actually *desire*$_2$ it” (**168***); two senses of “desirable” quietly at work here (replace “desire” with “want” to see this), but former is *not* entailed by latter: *you can’t derive a norm **solely** from a fact (e.g., God→law).*
  2. **Fallacy of composition:** “each person’s happiness is a good to that person, and the general happiness, *accordingly*, is a good to the aggregate of all persons” (**169***); ***Sidgwick:*** “an aggregate of actual desires, each directed towards a *different part* of the general happiness, does *not* constitute an actual desire for the *general* happiness, existing in any individual” (ME 388).
- **Solution?** Treat GHP as *axiomatic:* pleasure just intrinsically good, **pain intrinsically bad**. Intuitively plausible~, but….
- **Problem:** *other* intrinsic goods, many say, so how to reply?

Indirect Utilitarianism

- Mill therefore turns again to his discussion of *indirectness* (169-72; cf. 149-51; *GHP [ultimate] standard **not** motive*).
- Mill reasons that **virtue** (like *truth*, freedom, and beauty) should be ***treated as*** a "thing desirable *in itself,*" i.e., as an *intrinsic* good, because it is (or rather can become) "**part** of happiness," **not** just a means to it (169, 171; **psych?**: drug).
- He makes similar claims about money, power, fame, music, health, etc., which become the *proximate **motives*** even as happiness remains the *ultimate **standard*** (170-2; reply).
- Mill appears to be thinking in an Aristotelian manner here: pursuing the *constituents* of happiness ***for their own sake*** (e.g., intellectual, moral, or aesthetic virtues) is the best way to attain *happiness as a whole*. Why? Because…
- For Aristotle, happiness (*eudaimonia*) **is** "an activity of the soul in accordance with *virtue*," i.e., excellence (virtuosity).
- The problem is that Mill is trying to ***practice*** *eudaimonism* with a *hedonistic **theory***. How and why is this a problem?

Indirect Utilitarianism, cont.

- Something like *virtue* (e.g., the intellectual kind) could only be a **constituent** of happiness on an *Aristotelian* reading of the term, but Mill clearly maintains that happiness is simply *pleasure*, which is a *subjective sensation*.
- How could virtue, power, ***money***, fame, music, health, etc., be constituents of…pleasure? This appears to be a **category mistake** (e.g., "bright taste"): these things may *bring about* pleasure, but they are **not** pleasure *themselves*.
- This is a kind of a psychopathology, *viz.* **fetishism** (mistaking the symbol for the thing represented and desiring it for that reason; *religious example*)—but Mill regards this as a useful (i.e., social-utility enhancing) ***psychological illusion***. **Why?**
- Is this really consistent with **transparency**, which he is quick to demand in *political* contexts (e.g., "publicity": CRG 227)?
- **Solution?** Treat virtue, etc., as *mere means* to pleasure, but this will conflict with many people's considered judgments.

Justice and Utility

- *Three* evaluative categories for actions/agents (184-5; cf. 151-2, 160):
  1. **Justice:** *perfect* duties (require *certain actions or omissions*; e.g., do not steal or murder); correlative ***rights*** (e.g., to property or life); enforce by *law* (e.g., fines, jail, execution).
  2. **Morality** (*other than* justice): *imperfect* duties (do *not* require certain actions or omissions but rather setting *certain ends*; e.g., be polite, give to charity); *no* correlative rights; enforce by *opinion*, i.e., social pressure (e.g., upbraiding, contempt, ostracism).
  3. **Expediency/Worthiness:** "there are things which we wish that people should do, which we even like or admire them for doing, perhaps dislike or despise them for not doing, but yet admit that they are *not bound to do;* it is *not* a case of moral obligation; we do not blame them, that is, *we do not think they are proper objects of* ***punishment***." (e.g., addict)
- **Utility is the ground of justice…and limits it**: "to have a *right*, then, is, I conceive, to have something which society ought to defend me in the possession of. If the objector goes on to query, why it ought? I can give him no other reason than *general utility*.… All persons are deemed to have a *right* to equality of treatment, *except when some recognized social expediency requires the reverse*" (189, 200; cf. OL…& Plato).